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By-Nachtmann, Francis

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Successful language study in college depends on intelligent placement of entering students. The types of placement tests must first be determined, then norms must be established by the specific college or university doing the placing. The variables affecting student achievement in high school language courses can serve as a guide for the student's placement in college classes. Some of these variables include a continuously changing faculty, a lack of carefully thought-out goals, a lapse of time for language study between high school and college, and a lack of uniform instruction and technique from year to year within the high school. If good language students are to be produced, the institutions of higher learning must recognize their responsibility to work closely together with the high schools toward improved program articulation. (SS)

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PROBLEMS OF ARTICULATION BETWEEN HIGH SCHOOL AND COLLEGE LANGUAGES COURSES

Francis Nachtmann, University of Illinois

Paper delivered at the American Association of Teachers of French, December 1967

President Daugherty, distinguished guests, and fellow teachers of French: When our president first sent me the line-up of the program for this evening, it struck me that it was remarkably like a menu. I was in Europe at the time; so you will understand why I was thinking in terms of menus. You will understand my preoccupation even better if I tell you that I had my wife and four children with me, and it was imperative that, before entering a restaurant, we study the menus posted at the doors if we wanted to maintain solvency. So when I saw the list of three speakers the thought occurred to me: "Ah, l'entrée, le plat du jour, et le dessert." I didn't know then that there was also to be an apéritif on the program at five o'clock, preceding the main courses. Of course the entrée can be dispensed with in many restaurants, giving a somewhat better price. But if you take it, it offers miscellaneous possibilities, one of the most fascinating of which, listed on a number of menus, is assiette de crudités. So I fancy myself this evening offering your assiette de crudités, your roughage, your vitamines, before you move on to the plat du jour and the dessert, which you are probably awaiting with much more interest.

Articulation is a popular word at this conference, since it appears in two places on the program and with a different meaning. In the present sense, it implies a joint between two limbs, between two neighboring units and all too often in our school systems we have arthritis in our joints. In fact, when language administrators get together and begin to talk about what ails them, they almost always end up discussing placement and articulation problems, like Frenchmen discussing their livers.

There has always been a tendency of teachers to complain about the quality of pupils they receive from previous teachers, and language teachers are no exception. The eighth-grade teacher is unhappy with the pupils she receives from the seventh-grade teacher. The high-school teacher finds the children coming in from the junior high far below the standards she expects. And this goes on all up the line to the point where the professor in advanced French classes frequently deplores the previous training of his students, who have neither the linguistic or the literary knowledge that he expects them to have on entering his course.

Added to this natural tendency, we can observe that language teaching is in a state of turmoil, and schools are groping for the

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best method to use. The audio-lingual method has become common, but there are still numerous teachers using other methods, and the situation is further complicated by the presence in the field of a sizable minority of inadequate teachers who do not have any method, but whose retention is favored by the general shortage of language teachers. Students from all these varied instructors arrive in college, and, to cap it off, the students themselves often have a gap in time between their high school and college contact with foreign languages.

Their are two necessary approaches to the situation. The language students have to be accepted as they are, with all the variety that they exhibit on arriving in college, and they have to be placed intelligently, so that they can continue language study with a reasonable expectation of success. Secondly, all institutions and persons involved have the duty to work to reduce the shock that many college freshmen experience when they continue the language study started in high school. Let us consider placement first. If in doing so, I frequently refer to the University of Illinois, it is because that is where I learned about placement examinations, it has been concentrating on placement and in dealing with other institutions I have not found any other large university, and very few small colleges, that have as practical a placement system.

Since the calendar years of language exposure on a college freshman's high school transcript have widely varying significance, the freshman needs to be tested, and placed where his knowledge classifies him. What skills should be tested? With all the emphasis that is placed in this day and age on the audio-lingual skills, it seems a cynical contradiction to ignore the oral skills in placement testing. Yet a large number of institutions administer nothing but a reading test in foreign languages to incoming freshmen. Ideally, all four skills of listening-comprehension, speaking, reading, and writing should be tested, and some efficient small colleges do just that. But there is a problem with the speaking and writing examinations. The University of Illinois, like a great many other universities and colleges, uses the MLA examination as a placement instrument. When there are 2500 Freshmen to be tested, it is out of the question to administer speaking and writing examinations. These two parts are slow, tedious and expensive to correct because they require the attention of a person who knows the language and who can make subjective judgments. On the other hand, the reading and listening comprehension examinations can be administered by non-teachers and can be machine-scored. Our Division of Measurement and Research has conducted experiments which show that the score on the MLA speaking examination is the least realiable indicator for predicting success in a language course, at least in our U. of Illinois language departments, and that the reading and listening-comprehension scores are the two most correlated with the final grade given in a course. I strongly suspect this situation would prove equally

true in other institutions. In any case, the University of Illinois has found these two parts of the MLA tests to be the most satisfactory to administer for placement.

After deciding which tests to use, the next step is to decide the norms. There are, of course, published norms, but there should be norms in terms of the institution which is doing the placing. At the University of Illinois the norms have been established by administering the MLA examinations as final examinations, or as part of the final examinations, in all the elementary and intermediate courses. On two occasions the entire battery of tests on the four skills has been administered at the end of the course, and at other times one or more parts of the MLA battery have been included in the final examination.

An entering freshman can be placed, then, by comparing his score on the same examination in the listening and reading portions; if he obtains a score equivalent to or higher than the midpoint of the end-of course norms for the college classes, he is considered to have achieved that level of proficiency in the language. In other words, if the entering freshman obtains a score equal to C^+ or above of a college student at the end of the first semester, he goes into the second semester; if he reaches a score equal to C^+ or above of a college student at the end of the second semester, the newcomer is placed into the third semester of college work, and so on.

The University of Illinois in the several years that it has been engaging in this large-scale testing enterprise, has been endeavoring to see what are the variables which affect student achievement in high school foreign language courses and which, if known, can guide the high school graduate's placement in college classes. Out of this experiment has come a rather dramatic indication that the traditional formula of "one year of high school equaling one semester of college foreign language" is not true. These findings were set forth in the October 1967 issue of the MLJ in an article entitled "A Study of an Assumption about High School and College Equivalency in Language Training," written by Richard E. Spencer and Ronald L. Flaugher. Without repeating all the figures I will cite some of the findings. The authors first compared the Illinois results with published high-school norms. It was found that the college students' norms almost invariably exceed the high-school so-called "equivalent," and even outstandingly so in certain aspects. Of course it could be argued that the high-school norms include the scores of many low-ability students who do not go on to college. But then the scores of incoming freshmen were compared with the established college norms. Again, there was a marked difference in favor of the college-trained students. Therefore, a placement policy assuming that one year of high school equals one semester of college would very likely fail in its attempt to provide an orderly progression between high-school and college language achievement. The conclusion from the U. of Illinois testing program is that

two years of high-school language equal one semester of college, that three years of high school language equal two semesters of college. Since the majority of the students have to drop back, the question arises as to what college credit will be granted for work which presumably repeats some of their high school work. Many universities do not grant credit to students who have to drop back; the University of Illinois does. Now there is the motivational factor which enters into any student's performance on a placement test. If the students were not motivated to do well on the test, they might attempt to manipulate the results so as to assure their being placed in a class where they would find the work very easy. So a penalty clause exists in the placement policies, which states that a student may be placed for credit in the semester sequence, one semester lower than the number of high-school years he has acquired in that language. If he places lower than that, no credit toward graduation. On the other hand, proficiency credit toward graduation is granted to any student who places ahead of the expected level. Here are the figures on placement from last summer. 2555 students were tested. 59% back-placed, 34% of them without credit--in other words, more than one semester. 8% advanced-placed--in other words received credit without taking certain levels. This left 35% who placed according to the traditional formula. I might mention some figures for French students; of the 986 French students who took the placement test, 512 back-placed.

The test is administered by non-teaching personnel and the placement is done by computers. But mistakes can occur. So there is a further flexibility built into the placement policy. If a student becomes convinced during the first three weeks of class that he has been placed above where he should be, and if his teacher concurs, he may drop back a semester.

I have observed that students are seldom resistant to being placed back. In fact, they are usually grateful that there is a process for evaluating their achievement, because so many of them approach the college language requirement with great uneasiness about their own qualifications to compete. A very common source of their uneasiness, and justifiably so, is the lapse of time between their last high-school experience with the language and the time at which they resume it in college. It had always been thought that the lapse of time had an influence on the placement of freshmen in college, but the first systematic measurement of this influence is contained in a study carried out by the same two men, Spencer and Flaugher of the University of Illinois and published in the November 1967 issue of the MLJ under the title: "College Foreign Language Placement and the Intervening Years Problem." You can consult the article in the November issue of MLJ and see the absolute regularity with which the intervening time has a direct influence on the performance on the placement examination.

Test scores decline about 15% over the first intervening year, and about another 12% over the second year. But the authors can see in a certain behavior of the scores--the so-called standard deviation--that there are some further factors at work. For instance, certain incoming freshmen perform quite well even after several years' lapse. So it is conjectured, quite plausibly, that the two probable other factors are the basic aptitude of the student himself and the quality of his high school's instructional program in foreign languages. Dr. Spencer's staff is now studying the steadily accumulating placement results to determine if the other variables can be isolated and taken into consideration to provide even more accurate placement and prediction of success.

Before I leave the matter of placement I would like to communicate the results of one other study by Dr. Spencer and his staff, which will probably interest you. A questionnaire was sent out to the colleges and universities of the country asking what skills they tested in placement and which of the published tests they used. Here are the results. Questionnaires were sent to 1062 four-year institutions. 342 responded, and of those, 152 responded for French. Of the 152 which administer a test to incoming students of French, 110 give a reading examination
74 give a writing examination
68 give a listening examination
27 give a speaking examination.
48 of these schools use the examination for proficiency determination as well as placement. The most commonly used examination is the MLA. The second most popular is the College Board. Third is the Cooperative Examination. A single school here and there uses some other published examination or uses its own. Because the questionnaire obtained only a partial coverage, a test was run on the results to see if they were representative--they murmured incantations over them or whatever statisticians do to such results--and they satisfied themselves that they had a representative sample of the placement policy practices around the country.

Let us turn from the process of handling the high school students who go on to college and take a look at them before they leave high school. The lapse between high school and college foreign language study is likely to continue, because most high school teachers seem opposed to deferring language study to the last two years of high school. It would deprive them of the opportunity of recruiting students for a third and fourth year. Moreover, there will always be college students who, through one cause or another, do not resume their language study in their freshman year or do not start their college study immediately upon high school graduation.

As for the quality of the instruction and the individual capacity of the student, we all can observe what a vast range there is in each of these. We cannot change the native ability of the individual student.

We can improve his motivation if he gets top-quality instruction. The quality of the instruction varies from schools that give a thoroughly consistent, progressive experience with the language and the literature, to others in which the language course might as well be labeled mathematics or home room or something else. I have had college students assure me that they did not do a thing throughout their high school language study. When I protested, "But, look, you have a B in French on your transcript," they have answered "I know, but I didn't do a thing, and I didn't learn a thing." This I know can be true, because I have two teen-age agents in my own family who bring me back intelligence reports on two of our local modern language classes. One is in second-year French; the other in second-year Spanish. The French is boresome trivia; the other class is thinly disguised chaos labeled as Spanish II. And this in a prosperous school system which proudly flaunts on its letterhead the words "The Pacemaker School System." Now my offspring will not suffer irreparable damage, because they have enough personal ambition and stimulation from home to profit even from the thin gruel they receive. But what about the other students? If they continue the same language in college, they will no doubt find themselves starting over again from the beginning.

A part of the problem lies in the gypsy quality of American life. Language teachers, like other Americans, move around a lot. But you do not get quality from an ever-changing faculty. Good high school language faculties are characterized, among other things, by stability. Movement of teachers is further aggravated by the great shortage of language teachers. Last year, for example, when the University of Illinois was preparing 74 seniors in its teacher-training program in languages, the University Teacher Placement Service received 2306 calls for high school and junior high foreign language teachers. The total for French was 804. Our own teacher-training majors in French at the University of Illinois are almost always aiming at jobs in the Chicago suburbs, and that is where they get them. The French teachers that I know in the small towns around where I live are mostly middle-aged women who were already established in the community and who were drafted back into education after their children were raised. Without them the community would probably not have a French teacher.

Rather than let ourselves be discouraged by what we see, let us follow that Oriental proverb that says "It is better to light one candle than to curse the darkness." There are a great many sincere, hard-working teachers in the field who are looking for ways to improve their effectiveness and prepare their students better for college. They want to know what they can do. There are some things they can do for themselves, and there are some things the colleges and universities can do to help them. The first thing they can do for themselves is to communicate with others engaged in the same task. The French teacher in a high school should know the goals and techniques of the other French teachers in the same school and in the same school system. The

senior members of the French-teaching community should lead the others in a discussion of just what everyone is aiming at. Teachers should not just teach, teach, teach without ever thinking of what they are doing. Too often the only thinking that seems to get done, after the results prove mediocre, is the thought of changing the textbook. This can happen in College, too.

The French teachers of any community ought to decide what they are going to insist that their students learn, and then they should go out and insist that they learn it. If a teacher has clearly in mind what he is emphasizing, what he considers the minimum essentials, and if he unflaggingly emphasizes them throughout the school year, the student cannot avoid learning them. Of course, these same points must continue to be emphasized during the second year and the third year, at the same time that other items are being added. So if there is more than one teacher, they must be in agreement on what points they are driving home. The agreement should deal with specifics. For example, instead of a lot of vague generalities about speaking ability, what specific things are we going to demand? Should the student at the end of the second year be able to answer a simple "yes-no" question correctly in the passé composé: Avez-vous vu mon livre? Vous êtes-vous promené un peu? As to the ability to pronounce the written language, should the student be able to discriminate the spellings that indicate the various nasal vowels at the end of the first year, the second year, the third year? The student must arrive at these skills some time. When? There are plenty of students who, after rambling around with oral methods for several years cannot do these things. Then as the students begin to do more and more reading of literature, how are we going to build up a command of the high-frequency words and idioms so that they can read with some assurance and pleasure. For instance the idiomatic use of the French present and imperfect tenses with depuis (Il lisait depuis deux heures), as common as it is, and usually introduced within the first semester of language study, sometimes remains vague in the mind of a student of French into his fifth or sixth year of study. I do not think that that is necessary. Or take the little word d'ailleurs, which seems to me the most slippery lexical item in French for our American students. The average student, if left to his own devices, will still be thumbing the dictionary for that word in his fourth year of French, and he still won't know how to pronounce it. Now it is my firm conviction that this word, which is on every third page of French prose and constantly in the mouths of French speakers can be learned; both as to pronunciation and meaning. Over the years, my students, faced with this mad conviction of mine, have simply surrendered and learned the pronunciation and meaning of d'ailleurs by its third or fourth occurrence.

The lack of a definite program shows up most regrettably on the later performance of the students. Last year one of the French teachers in my department told me that she had a very weak class and that all the

students in her class spoke badly of their high school teachers. The class in question was a conversation class made up mostly of freshmen who had come to the University with four years or more of high school French and who were continuing the study of French at the University. It intrigued me to hear that these students all spoke badly of their previous teachers. With such an experience, why were they continuing French? I thought the teacher must be exaggerating. And she was--in part. I visited the class and talked with the students. They were fourteen in number from all over Illinois and from a couple of other states, but about two thirds of them came from the large suburban high schools around Chicago. As I had expected, the quality of their instruction was not so uniformly low as their teacher had said. They did speak disparagingly of much of their high school instruction, but almost all of them could point to at least one instructor among the several they had had who had kept the flame alive. But when I questioned them about how their high school classes had been conducted at the various levels, a most disturbing picture emerged of a confused jumble of varied goals, philosophies, and techniques. There had been the wildest shift of emphasis from one teacher to another, from one level to another. For example, nothing but memorized dialogs the first year; the second year, translation of stories from French to English; third year, back to dialogs; etc. It was this confused, shifting emphasis which the students had sensed and which had left them very unintegrated French students; yet these were the ones who survived and who went on to study more French.

That was last year. To get ready for this talk I thought I ought to upgrade my data a little. So, a few weeks ago I started sampling the ideas of freshmen who are now enrolled in French classes. I visited classes and sent questionnaires to classes I could not visit. I discovered that the freshmen in advanced classes of course have had four years or more of French before coming to the University, are almost all enthusiastic about the kind of instruction they had in high school. A number of these freshmen are going to major or minor in French, and they seem to have gotten the idea from seeing French language and culture skillfully taught in high school. On the other hand, the freshmen in the intermediate classes, who have often been put back a semester by the placement test, point to a more irregular quality of instruction, and they have firmly declared some other major than French.

It would seem that French majors are made in high school. But without French majors there will be no public for the French professors to display their erudition before in the universities. There will be no new French teachers to fill the ranks of the college, high school, and grade school faculties of language teachers. So it looks as if we are forced to be one community.

The high school teachers, according to my observation, are eager to accept leadership from the universities. The universities need to

realize their responsibility to cooperate with the high schools, and they can learn much by such cooperation. There are various forms that this cooperation can take. Some states have excellent, active, vital organizations of language teachers whose meetings constitute a real cross-fertilization of ideas. Indiana University launched an interesting innovation eight years ago when it established the position of School-University Coordinator, which was filled by an experienced high-school teacher who became a kind of free-lance member of the Liberal Arts College available to perform every kind of service that would upgrade the quality of the high schools and link them more closely to the University. The solution that the University of Illinois has adopted is that of the Articulation Conference. I don't know how widespread this activity is. I believe it has been used in Florida; I don't know where else. I served as co-chairman of a School-University Articulation Conference for Foreign Language Teachers at the University of Illinois a couple of months ago. The primary invitation list was composed of the names of schools which regularly send ten or more freshmen a year to the University of Illinois campus. But, since the conference had been given wide publicity in the State, any school or individual teacher who expressed an interest was welcome. The expenses of the participants were paid by their own schools. The meeting convened first with a dinner, at which the visitors mingled with some fifty language professors, a dozen Liberal Arts Deans, Associate and Assistant, and the personnel from the College of Education who are concerned with languages. In the after-dinner speeches of the two meals involved, the visitors had a chance to hear the program of the University described as it applies to general policies such as placement. Then the visitors met with the faculty of the individual department they were mainly interested in: French, Spanish, German, Russian, and Classics. They visited University language classes, and they had interviews with their own former students now enrolled at the University. The visitors seemed very pleased to make direct contact with the University personnel, the latter having been chosen from among those who set policy for the courses dealing with freshmen.

The University teachers were wary, on this first occasion, of seeming to dictate to the high-school teachers, but we discovered that the visitors seemed to want something even more specific than we gave them. From the evaluation questionnaires which they filled out at the end of the conference I can quote a few samples which show the trend of their thinking: "We need to spell out some sort of minimum essentials per year or per semester."

"We need recommendations in a concrete way of what you think we ought to do."

"What can the high school teachers do to improve correlation and continuity?"

"What should the first year consist of, the second year, the third year, etc."

Some also requested case histories of some of their former students.

So next year's conference will confront each language group with a proposed syllabus to be discussed before the group by a panel of university and high school teachers, and there will be case histories of students as far as we are able to trace them. We may also be able through the research of the Testing Service, to present the visitors with data as to which high schools regularly send the best students to the University, and when those schools are identified, we can ask them to describe their programs for the others.

If we are to produce good language students, if we are to begin making up the shortage in language teachers, we must have sympathetic collaboration between the institutions of higher education and the high schools, just as we must have close coordination between the high schools and the junior highs, and between the junior highs and the FLES programs. There is no room for lofty detachment by the University professors of advanced literature, either. The graduate student who is participating in a Seminar on Proust today was only a few years ago an elementary and intermediate student of French in high school. If he became enthusiastic about French language and literature and decided to major in them in college, it is usually because some high school teacher or teachers first fired him with enthusiasm for the subject. And that high school teacher, in turn, was originally trained by the university professors. All the processes are intimately interdependent. The teacher-training function is second in importance to none other that the university or college performs. We are forever rediscovering that, over and above all methods, texts or laboratories, we must recognize the crucial role of the teachers, produce good teachers. And there is one thing more: they must work together.